THE RELIGION OF THE WITS

At *BUTTON*'s Refuted;

In a New Method; by running up the remoter Contests which divide Mankind to first and undeniable Principles.

With a General Account of Ancient and Modern Exceptions relating to Scepticism, Atheism, Deism, Providence, Immortality of the Soul, Natural and Reveal'd Religion.

The Whole being an easie Introduction to that Necessary, but hitherto unattempted Performance of applying the Motives of Christianity in General, to some Particular Society of that Profession, as they now stand divided.

In a Dialogue between a POLITICIAN, *and a* DIVINE.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

SAMUEL FULLER Esq;

Member of Parliament for *Petersfield.*

SIR,

THE bold Title I have prefix'd to this Performance, puts me upon seeking for a Patron of a daring Merit, and uncommon Penetration. Many Circumstances do entitle you to the Guardianship of my Labours, but this alone is sufficient, that you can have no Rival in your humble Pretensions to my Favour and Esteem. I lay this imperfect Embrio at your Feet, that you may breath Life into it; and I approach you in a Penitential Address; for being so notorious a Plagiary, as to expose the choisest Thoughts I glean'd from your Conversation, as my own Production. However I am glad I have this fair Opportunity of making Restitution; or at least, that what has suffer'd by passing through my Hands, may be retouch'd, and brightn'd up by their first Author. I fear no Criticks, where You are to pass the first Censure: Nor on the other Hand can you apprehend Flatetry, where Merits are above its reach. Stars were not form'd to be roul'd upon the Surface of the Earth, but to

grace the Firmament; *and when Providence bleſſeth ſome Perſons with a diſtinguiſhable Luſtre, the deſign is, that they ſhou'd ſhine in ſome Superior Orb, and ſend forth their Rays upon the darker Parts of the Creation. The Works of Nature are ſeldom Perfect: She diſtributes her* Treaſures *with a careleſs Hand, and parcels her* Talents *at random. But in You She has broke through her irregular Methods, and loaded You with Plenty: Your tender Years have bended under the weight of all her charming Luggage. The higheſt Pitch a Mortal can be raiſed to, is to be remarkable for an exact Symetry in Words and Thoughts; this is judged by moſt to be your Talent. Your* Ideas, *(with Submiſſion to Mr.* L----k*) ſeem Innate, and rang'd in order from the beginning, and Nature her ſelf has cloath'd your Thoughts with proper Terms, and were ſhe to ſpeak her ſelf in her own Language, it would be with that bold Accent, and original Significancy, which has diſtinguiſh'd You from the reſt of Mortals.* To Conclude, *The great* Waller *lives with advantage in his* Grandſon, *and the Ingenious Sir* R----d S----e *Publiſh'd the beſt* Volume *of his* Wit, *in the choice he made of ſuch an* Acquaintance, *and as they equally may glory in your Alliance and Friendſhip: So I take no little Pride in having him for a* Patron *whom in all Submiſſion,*

I Honour and Reſpect,

under the conceal'd Name of

C. N.

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THE RELIGION OF THE WITS.

SECTION I.

Introduction.

Politician. THIS was kindly done, certainly ſome good *Genius* prompted my old Friend to this ſeaſonable Viſit. I always took a ſingular Pleaſure in your Converſation; but at this Juncture, you are the only Perſon in the World I coveted to meet with.

Divine. I find Sir, you ſtill retain your obliging Temper, to put the higheſt value upno Trifles, which, tho' in points of Civility, it is only a harmleſs violation of Juſtice, yet conſidering the Obligations I lie under, you have no occaſion to rally me with ſuch Compliments. You are no Stranger to the real eſteem I always had for you; of which I cou'd give no greater demonſtration, than by the freedom I took in checking ſome of your Youthful Sallies, and warning you of the dangerous tendency of your Converſation with Perſons who diſtinguiſh'd themſelves by an uncontroulable Liberty in Opining. *Liberty*, I own, is a Word full of inexpreſſible Charms, but it often has dire Effects, both in *Politicks* and *Religion*. I ſhou'd be glad to have been a falſe *Prophet*, but I always apprehended you wou'd be a Sufferer upon this Account.

Politician. You have touch'd upon the very Buſineſs in which I wanted your aſſiſtance. *Hell* it ſelf has not more Confuſion in it, than I experience in my unrang'd Notions: Like the *Dove* ſent out of the Ark, I have been carried over an *Ocean* of Uncertainties, and am now ſeeking for the reſting place from whence I firſt took flight. You, Sir, who have been acquainted with me from my Infancy, are upon many Accounts qualified to be my *Confeſſor*, I will therefore disburden my ſelf before you, and patiently expect both your Reaſons and Cenſures.

Divine. Errors have their *nonplus-ultra*, as well as other things, and when we have wan-

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der'd round the circle, the Centre is the only place to retire to. There is a *Period* for both *National*, and *Perſonal* Crimes; and I am glad to find that my old Acquaintance has Thoughts of being diſcreet, and that he is reſolv'd not to run upon the laſt extremity of Folly. You may aſſure your ſelf that I ſhall be attentive to your Scruples, and no leſs juſt in my Obſervations.

Politician. My Caſe, then, ſtands thus. I have Travell'd over moſt part of the *Habitable World*, and have devour'd an infinite Number of Books in all Arts and Sciences, and now I am return'd home as little ſatisfied with my curioſity, as I really find my ſelf leſs knowing by my *Enquiries*. At my firſt ſetting out I rang'd my ſelf amongſt the *Dogmaticks*, and every thing I advanced ſeem'd Self-evident, but finding by experience, that Men were of different Minds, and that the World was divided into *Pro* and *Con*, I ſhak'd Hands with my obſtinate Temper, and became an *Academick*. This freedom I enjoyed, in the way of Arguing, made me often change Sides. I found that Men of Wit had a Faculty of making any thing appear plauſible; and often when I judged an Aſſertion impregnable, I was ſurprized to ſee it conquer'd, and utterly demoliſhed by a Superior *Genius*. Theſe kind of diſappointments often repeated, have obliged me to ſtrike in with the *Scepticks*. I was ſometimes of Opinion, that *Scepticks* were only *Humoriſts*; a litigious Set of Mortals, diſpoſed to divert the World with what was new, and *Exotick*. But the un-

certainty I have met with in the Methods to Science, has confirm'd me, that if *Copernicus* his Syſtem of the Earths Mobility be a Fable, it has a very ſignificant Moral in Man's Head, where Truth has no fixt and permanent Being, but may be ſtruck out by the next Fantaſtick Idea, as one rowling Wave drives on another: Perhaps you may think I only curſe what I don't underſtand, and that ill Nature has made me turn *Sceptick*, and that I tax Mankind with a common deficiency, which may only be the Effect of my private Incapacity. But the Sequel will prove that I have Partners in my Folly, and that I labour with a common Diſtemper. You ſhall quickly be made ſenſible, *Sir*, what a crowd of Difficulties drove me to *Scepticiſm*. I am toſs'd like a Ship in a boiſterous Sea, without either Maſt or Rudder. I neither know where I am, or what I am; dead or alive, aſleep or awake, a Man or a Horſe: My Head is fill'd with crude and imperfect *Ideas* of things; my Sences are a continual Cheat, and impoſe upon my Underſtanding: One tells me this is Reaſon, another tells me that is Reaſon, but in effect 'tis only their own Humour or Paſſion. The World ſeems to be divided into two commendable Branches of *Authority* and *Obedience*, Superiors, and Inferiors; which in property of Speech is nothing but *Tyranny* and *Slavery*. *Religion* is the mighty cry of all Mankind, reverenced in Words, but contemptible and abandon'd in Practice. It is valued upon account of Revelation, or unintelligible Objects, as if every Product of Nature did not exhibit a thouſand

ſand Myſteries. We govern our ſelves by *Principles*, which are only obſtinate, Aſſertions which have gain'd credit by Antiquity, and inveterate Impoſitions upon Mankind. In fine, ſuch is the uncertainty of Human Affairs, that we neither know what's paſt nor preſent. *Hiſtories* are only the Ecchoes of our Anceſtors, Lyes recorded by Mercenary Scriblers, to perpetuate the Fiction. Circumſtances change both Perſons and Things, and by a very little turn, a Man may be both Wiſeman and Fool, a Traytor, and a good Subject; what we believe, may be either True or Falſe, and what we act, either Good or Evil. Both are probable, and neither certain; we live we don't know how, and when we dye, we go I don't know whither.

Divine. A very pretty *Syſtem* I muſt needs own, and worthy of their Embraces, who would be eſteem'd the bright Men of the Age. The Account you give of your Progreſs in the way of Knowledge contains ſomething ſo *whimſical*, that, to mediate a ſerious Reply wou'd be to ſympathize too much with your Character. A dark Apartment in *Moor-Fields*, and now and then breathing a Vein, is the beſt way of arguing with ſome kind of *Philoſophers*. You have Travell'd, and Read, indeed to a fair end, to looſe your Wits by thoſe laudable Curioſities which improve the reſt of Mankind. Not content with the Habitable World, I find you have often touch'd upon the *Terra Incognita*, and have made very large Diſcoveries in the Kingdom of *Spatia Imaginaria*. I am inclin'd

to believe, you have only dipt into the Secrets of thoſe *Philoſophers* you own your ſelf to have been a Member of; otherwiſe you might have diſcover'd, that a *Sceptick* takes along with him the obſtinacy of a *Dogmatick*; nor has he depoſed the wrangling Humour of the *Academicks*. You ſhall be convinc'd upon the reſult of our Conference, that *Scepticks* are not only litigious Humouriſts, but (what they will be very much mortified to hear) that they want that charming Qualification, for the ſake whereof only, they are ambitious of the Name of *Scepticks*; I mean good Senſe. In the mean time you muſt give me leave to be a little ſerious, and ſtate the Controverſy of *Scepticiſm* in ſuch a manner, that we may have no occaſion to make unneceſſary *Halts* when we ſhould be purſuing the Argument.

Politician. You miſtake me very much, *Sir*, if you think I am diſpoſed for eternal wrangling; my Life hitherto has been branch'd into unaccountable Excurſions, both as to my Notions and Morals, and 'tis now high time to be ſerious. So I hope you will lay the foundation of this Conference deep, that I may not be obliged to a future review, and I will urge every exception as far as it will bear.

Divine. A good Diſpoſition is a neceſſary Preparative for Conviction; and I am ſtrongly perſwaded the Fruits of this Diſcourſe, will equal the ſatisfaction I have, to ſpend an hour or two with a Perſon whoſe Capacity and Friendſhip are equally engaging. *Scepticiſm, or a wavering State of the Judgment*, I apprehend to be

be your *Mother Scruple.* If by this you wou'd underſtand that many things are doubtful, and may be call'd into Queſtion, I join with you; but if your Deſign be to promote an univerſal Uncertainty, the very Objection you propoſe, is a manifeſt diſproof of your *Syſtem.* Moderate *Scepticiſm* I allow of, as it is oppoſite to *Credulity*; but this I call not *Scepticiſm*, but *Criticiſm.* But to eſtabliſh a true *Idea* of the Queſtion in Hand; I will fix ſome preliminary Notions and Definitions, which to any ſober Thinker, will both open the Cauſe, and decide it. The Controverſy is not, whether many vulgar received Aſſertions are not uncertain? I am ſenſible what Diſadvantages Man's Judgment labours under in the purſuit of Truth, as well upon account of his narrow Reach, as the clogs of *Education*, *Paſſion*, *Intereſt*, *&c.* The Nicety of the Enquiry is: Whether we are not able to produce ſome undeniable *Principles* and *Poſtulata's*, which in the Nature of *Land-Marks*, are not only capable to evidence themſelves, but to ſupport other inferior Truths deducible from them? To clear this Point, it muſt be obſerv'd; what Certainty is, and under what Notion it may be conſider'd as to our preſent purpoſe. A Thing may be, and I not certainly know it is; from this reflexion we may diſtinguiſh two ſorts of Certainty; a certainty of *Exiſtence*, and a certainty of *Perſwaſion*: *For Inſtance*, That there is ſuch a City as *Rome*, is certain, by a certainty of *Exiſtence*, but not by a certainty of *Perſwaſion* to one that never heard of ſuch a Place. This Diviſion of Certainty is

ſtil'd by Philoſophers *Objectiva* and *Subjectiva*: By Divines, *Quoad ſe* and *Quoad nos*. Now the Certainty we are in queſt of, is of the latter ſort, and in Effect the queſtion amounts to this; whether I can ſo far in my Judgment be perſwaded of the Exiſtence of Things, as not to harbour the leaſt doubt of being impoſed upon. I might here put this Controverſy upon a very ſhort iſſue, by obliging the *Sceptick* to ſubſcribe to his own *doubting, wrangling, railing Being*, as to one of thoſe Aſſertions which cannot be call'd into Queſtion; for as *nothing* cannot wrangle and diſpute, ſo what is capable of theſe emotions, muſt of neceſſity have a certain Being. Now as *Archimedes* wanted but a place to ſet his Foot upon, in order to move the whole Earth: So this one *Poſtulatum* of Man's Exiſtence being allow'd by a *Sceptick*, it will give birth to a multitude of other undeniable Aſſertions upon which the *Oeconomy* of Nature depends. But I ſuppoſe your Deſign is to enter a little further into Particulars.

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SECTION II.

Metaphyſical, or Self-Evident Certainty.

Politician. AS my Doubts and Scruples are particular, ſo if you dwell too much upon *Generals*, I am afraid I ſhall not meet with that ſatisfaction I propoſed to my ſelf. You have already mention'd the undeniable *Poſtulatum* of *Self Exiſtence*, but this being a very remote Notion, it will be uſeleſs in relation to practical Truths, unleſs we deſcend to more *minute Aſſertions*.

Divine. My deſign is to be as particular as a Subject of this nature will permit; and in the firſt place it cannot be denied, but there are ſeveral Truths *Self-Evident*, admitting of no Proof *a Priori*, but perſwaſive by a bare Intuition: For *the purpoſe*; I provoke the moſt obſtinate *Humoriſt* to diſſent, if he can, from the following Aſſertions. *The ſame thing cannot be, and not be at the ſame time; what is, is; what has been, has been: Twice two make four; the whole is bigger than the part; a Triangle has three Corners.* Theſe Aſſertions are *Metaphyſicaly* certain, *Self-Evident*, for 'tis impoſſible they ſhould be falſe. They are ſtanding Truths at all Times, in all Nations, and on all Occurrences, no Circumſtance being able to alter them. They are agreeable to all Syſtems of *Philoſophy* and *Divinity*. Let a Man be *Ariſtotelian* or *Carteſian*, *Scotiſt*

Scotiſt or *Thomiſt*, *Papiſt* or *Proteſtant*, *Chriſtian* or *Heathen*, they all agree, that the *Whole is bigger than the Part.*

Politician. I cannot diſagree to what you ſay upon this head, but ſtill you are too General.

Divine. You muſt have Patience till the matter I am upon ripens into Particulars: And to proceed; all other Truths are in themſelves equally perſpicuous to thoſe I now mention'd, were we equally Capacitated to comprehend them. 'Tis not only *Principles*, but there are many *Inferences* we cannot diſſent from, yet many things occur to render them obſcure; and tho' we are very much in the dark in regard of the *Oeconomy* of nature, by the affected Impoſitions of *Education* and *Paſſion*, which will not ſuffer us to be as Wiſe as we really are, yet with a little Pains we may gain the end of the Thread, and draw our ſelves out of the *Labyrinth.* I will here give you a ſhort *Specimen* of this method. Every Man is convinced of this General Aſſertion, *That the ſame Thing cannot be, and not be at the ſame time*; and as an Inference from hence, *That the World could not Exiſt, and not Exiſt at the ſame time*; and in purſuance to this, *That the World could not make it ſelf*; again, *That it was either made by another, or had no beginning.* But afterwards when we proceed to more remote Inquiries: *Viz.* Why the World could not always Exiſt without any beginning? Why a neceſſary *Being* call'd *God*, muſt be acknowledged to give it a beginning? Why this *Being* is but one? Why

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he is a Thinking Subſtance, and not material? Why we muſt pay *Homage* to Him? What kind of *Homage* or *Worſhip* is moſt pleaſing to Him? Whether in this we are to follow our own Inclinations, or the Directions of others? Whether our *Guides* are peremptorily to be obey'd, or deſerted in ſome Caſes? Whether the *Oeconomy* of our Worſhip is *Provincial*, *National*, or *Oecumenical?* Whether our Rule was all Penn'd by the *Law-Maker*, or partly handed down by *Tradition?* Theſe, with many other Articles, debated amongſt the different Sects of *Chriſtianity*, are Points as much fixt in themſelves, and determinable by us, as the undeniable Truths they may be deduced from; if the Obſtacles of *Ignorance*, *Paſſion*, and *Education* did not hinder Men from ſeeing, or owning the neceſſary Connexion between thoſe *Self Evident Principles*, and the *Inferences* which might be drawn.

Politician. Your Obſervation is nicely juſt, and a great part of it I have experienced in my own Conduct. I cou'd mention ſeveral conſiderable Errors I have corrected, which were entirely owing to the Converſation I had with Perſons who found it their Intereſt to inſtil ſuch Notions into me. Some Truths have been kept from me for want of an Opportunity of being inform'd; other things I wou'd not know, becauſe I wou'd not enquire, and very often, tho' I was convinced in my Opinion, yet I behaved my ſelf in regard of *Belief* as *Libertines* do in regard of *Morals*; that is, either through a motive of *Intereſt*, or ſome other darling *Paſſion*, I wou'd neither acknowledge by Words,

Words, nor go over in practice to the real perſwaſion of my Mind.

Divine. By this you may eaſily perceive that *Certainty* is not only to be found in *General Principles*, but in ſeveral remote *Inferences*. I confeſs in theſe Latter Caſes *Truth* does not ſhine ſo very bright, nor cannot be approached without removing ſome Obſtacles; which notwithſtanding are every day ſurmounted, and Men are let both into the Secrets of *Nature* and *Religion*. Thoſe Difficulties are overcome by *Study*, theſe by *Prayer*.

SECTION III.

Phyſical, or Experimental Certainty.

Politician. I Perceive you ſtick cloſe to your firſt Deſign of beginning at the bottom of things. I very much approve of your Method, of firſt eſtabliſhing a true Notion of *Certainty*; for if I apprehend things right, the *Mediums* and *Objects* of Knowledge, being different, they muſt occaſion ſome difference in *Certainty*.

Divine. You take things right; I will therefore go on. Beſides the *Metaphyſical Certainty* I have already eſtabliſhed, there is another Certainty which *Philoſophers* call *Phyſical*, and I make bold to ſtile it *experimental*, becauſe it depends

pends upon the daily Testimony of the Sences. This kind of certainty fully satisfies the Judgment, but may possibly fail: *For Instance*, When I see a *Man*, *Ship*, *Wood*, or *Castle*, I may be satisfied that they are what they appear to be, yet it is not impossible there may be some mistake in the Information given by the Eye, and these mistakes are sometimes discover'd by Reason. Upon this account a *Physical* or *Experimental Certainty*, tho' a real Certainty, is much Inferior to that above describ'd, which excludes all Possibility of mistake.

Politician. I must interrupt you here with a Word or two, methinks the Notion you have laid down of *Physical Certainty*, does not Answer your main design. How can that method be certain, which sometimes proves false? or how can it prudentially be relyed upon in practice?

Divine. I own the Sences consider'd separately, often prove a deceitful Rule in some particular Cases; yet we are reliev'd by Reason, or some other superior Light upon those occasions; and in the main, the Sences cannot unanimously concur to deceive Mankind.

Politician. Is then, God under an obligation to rectifie Objects in such a manner, that we shall not be mistaken in apprehending them? what inconvenience is there to affirm, that God might have fraim'd our Eye in such a manner, that a *Mountain* shou'd always appear like a *Mole Hill*.

Divine. If the mistake subvert not the notion of *Providence* and *Divine Attributes*, I see no

no great abſurdity in that Suppoſition; but conſidering the *Divine Scheme* laid here below of Men, procuring their future happineſs by the mediation of Sence, 'tis inconſiſtent with *God*'s Goodneſs, and his other perfections, to furniſh them with falſe Mediums in order to obtain that happineſs unto which he expects they ſhould arrive. *For the Purpoſe:* If the *Ear* ſhould drink in Errors, and conveigh them to the *Underſtanding*, when the Words imported Truth; and the *Eye* ſhould miſrepreſent *Objects ſo far*, as to occaſion Men to violate the *Laws of God*, when they judg'd themſelves to act innocently, would not this Conduct argue both Injuſtice and Cruelty in our *Creator*, in commanding Impoſſibilities? But to be yet more diſtinct upon this Head: The certainty of our Sences ſeems to ſtand upon this bottom. When I behold a *Ship* riding at Sea at a juſt diſtance, I am fully ſatisfied, without the leaſt doubt or heſitation, that it is not a *Church*; becauſe I find, both by my own, and the experience of the reſt of the World, that what Men call a *Church*, never ſtands upon the *Sea*, but upon *Land*: beſides a thouſand other Circumſtances, which clearly demonſtrate the difference between a *Ship* and a *Church*. But what again is more to the purpoſe, I am fully ſatisfied, and experimentally certain, that when I kill a *Fowl*, I have not ſhot a *Man*: For tho' it is not abſolutely impoſſible but a *Man* may have the ſhape of a *Fowl*, yet conſidering that *God* has laid an injunction upon me not to deſtroy a *Man*, and that under pain of damnation,

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and at the ſame time I am permitted to deſtroy a *Fowl*, it is certainly inconſiſtent with *Divine Providence*, to provide me with ſuch Eyes that I ſhould not be able to diſcover a *Man* from a *Fowl*, but that they ſhould always appear the ſame thing to me. 'Tis therefore originally as certain, that my Sences do not deceive me in relation to future happineſs, as that God Exiſts, is infinitely Good, or that I Exiſt my ſelf.

Politician. You have ſufficiently clear'd this Point: Pray proceed, that I may have time ſufficient to expoſe the Scruples which have ſo long perplex'd me.

SECTION IV.

Moral, or Prudential Certainty.

Divine. I Am arrived at the laſt branch of *Certainty*; which is uſually call'd *Moral*, or *Prudential*, as being chiefly grounded upon the Relation of others, and upon outward *Prudential Motives*. This Certainty is of conſiderable Latitude, being greater, or leſs, according to the ſtrength of thoſe Motives which induce us to Aſſent. *For Example:* I have no *Metaphyſical* Certainty that there is ſuch a City as *Rome*, becauſe my conviction is not from an *Innate*, *Inſeparable Idea*, but an acquir'd Knowledge. Neither have I properly a *Phyſi-*

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cal Certainty that there is ſuch a place as *Rome*; it never having fallen under the Cognizance of my Sences; yet I am ſo convinced there is ſuch a Place by the Relation of others (no Man denying its exiſtence, nor can the World have any grounds to invent ſuch a fiction) that 'tis morally impoſſible (tho' abſolutely poſſible) I ſhould be impoſed upon. Now *Moral Certainty* is what we generally go upon in things relating to *Hiſtory*, *Commerce*, *Oeconomy*, *&c.* and as I obſerved, there was ſome variety and Latitude in it, ſo it will be requiſite to mention an Example or two. We have no ſenſible proof there ever were ſuch Perſons as *Moſes*, *David*, *Ceſar*, *Henry* the VIIIth, *&c.* yet the concurring Teſtimonies of *Hiſtorians* do ground a *Moral Certainty*, ſo as to put it out of all doubt. We have no ſenſible Conviction of the Legitimacy of a *Prince*, *Parent*, or Men's Honeſty in way of Dealing; yet we may be ſo far ſatisfied in theſe reſpects, as not to demur in paying Subjection to Superiors, or confiding in the management of others. 'Tis true; as I hinted before, there is a Latitude in this kind of Certainty, and the ſtronger Motives we meet with, the greater is eſteem'd our Certainty.

Politician. According to my manner of apprehending things, what is certain, is certain; that is, it will not deceive me. So to make degrees in Certainty, ſeems to me, to be a Self-deſtructive Notion: Do not all Degrees of Certainty exclude the fear of being miſtaken.

Divine.

Divine. No: *Fear* and *Certainty* are not inconsistent. I am afraid to look from the top of the *Monument*, tho' I am certain I shall not fall. I can, indeed, assent to *Cesar*'s being Emperor of *Rome*, without any doubt or hesitation: But a Person in assenting to the *Legitimacy* of his *Children*, or the *Honesty* of his *Steward*, may sometimes admit of doubts. If the Doubts are rational, and well grounded, they destroy *Moral Certainty*; if they amout to no more than general Suspitions, they are consistent with Certainty, and 'tis Prudence to neglect them in our Conduct.

Politician. I perceive easily, that *Moral Certainty* is capable to satisfie a Person's Judgment; but this will fall short of what you seem to attempt; to reduce all things to an *absolute* and *undeniable Certainty*. Which way can *Moral Certainty* arrive to this perfection?

Divine. Originally all Certainty is *Absolute* and *Metaphysical*. and 'tis stil'd *Moral* and *Physical*, only in regard of the more immediate Proofs and Motives. This is very plain in the case of Religion: 'Tis ordain'd by Providence, that Men shall arrive at Happiness, by observing what is prescrib'd by *Christ* and his *Apostles* in reveal'd Religion. *Historical Credit* is the means of having these Prescriptions convey'd to us; and the Inference must be, that it is inconsistent with *Divine Providence* to permit the World to be universally deceiv'd, in the credit they give to what History relates was done in former *Ages* relating to *Christianity*, and the manner of its Propagation. I own

God is not obliged to direct *Historians* in other Matters (for tho' it be morally impossible, yet there is no absurdity if all *Historians* should have imposed upon us, both as to the Person and Actions of *Julius Cesar*) but as to what regards the Preservation of *Religion*, or means to Happiness, besides the strength of *Common Historical Credit*, Providence is particularly engag'd not to seduce Mankind. Thus you perceive that the steps to the ultimate and original Certainty are regular, and gradual. Let the object be present, and convey'd by Sence, or absent, and convey'd by History, it all Centers in this one Point; that it is against the Notion of the *Deity* to suffer Men to live in a general delusion, in regard of the means which he designs shall make them happy. I have made a distinction between *Moral Certainty* and the *Physical Certainty* of the Sences, tho' in a more *Compendious Method*, the whole stress may lie upon the Sences only. For as *Moral Certainty* depends upon *Seeing* and *Hearing*, in this respect the Members of that Division are Coincident; and all Certainty that is not *Metaphysical*, may be said to depend upon the Sences; and according to this System, the Gradation runs thus. I who now live in *London* in the Year 1716. do read, or hear a Relation of what happen'd in *Palestine*, in the Reign of *Tiberius Cesar*, concerning *Christ* and his *Doctrine*; *Seeing* and *Hearing* are the means of conveying this Knowledge to me. *God* who is a Being infinitely Good, has ordain'd this Information as the only way to arrive at a Happiness he has

enjoyn'd

enjoyn'd me to look after. Therefore I may rely upon this means: Therefore I may depend upon the Teſtimony of my Sences: Therefore I may give credit to what *Hiſtory* relates concerning the Planting of *Chriſtianity*.

SECTION V.

Certainty of Man's State.

Politician. I Have given you very little interruption; but now I expect to be heard in my turn. You have, indeed, laid down ſeveral *Ideas*, in order to diſabuſe Mankind of the dangerous Miſtakes they lie under; yet I muſt make bold to renew my old Complaint, that you dwell too much upon Generals, and I have neither time nor application to ſhape any thing out of the *Embrio* you have laid before me: So, pray *Sir*, be pleas'd to give a diſtinct Anſwer to my Scruples as I propoſe them. You are no Stranger, Sir, to the many Illuſions which Men are ſubject to, and that they can give no certain demonſtrations, where, or in what poſture they are. How many are now playing their *Anticks* in *Bedlam*, who at the ſame time judge themſelves daily imployed in the Poſts they formerly lived in? Others in Nocturnal Rambles do in a Dream diſtinctly repeat the Actions of the Day: Nor does there want ſometimes, Perſons who have

ceited themſelves already diveſted of Mortality, and Inhabitants of another World. Now I would gladly know what certain Indication I can have, that I am neither in a *Dream*, *Lunatick*, nor *Dead*; for unleſs I can have ſome certainty as to theſe General Heads, 'tis in vain to look for it in the particular Circumſtances of Life.

Divine. I will humour your Inclinations; nor am I apprehenſive of finding much difficulty in reſolving all your Doubts, from the few *Principles* I have eſtabliſh'd. What you in the firſt place alledge, as to the uncertainty of your *State*: Tho' I might paſs it over as an unaccountable *Whimſey*, yet that I may omit nothing which you think worthy of being taken notice of. I own the *State* of Man's Life is ſubject to great alterations, which in one reſpect or other, do happen every Day: We are Strangers to the manner of our firſt appearance in the World, and can give no account of what happen'd to us in our *Infancy*. All the Certainty we have of theſe things, is taken from the relation of our *Parents*, and from what we obſerve in others who ſeem to be in equal Circumſtances. This is ſufficient to convince us there was a time when we had no *Being*, and it will at the ſame time ſerve as a Rule to direct us in diſcovering the *State* we are in. I have often obſerved, that *Death* puts a Perſon out of a capacity of following the uſual Courſes he did when alive. A Perſon upon his Demiſe, appears no more in his *Family*, in the *Church*, nor in the *Market*: His Body becomes motion-

motionleſs, it is either cram'd into a hole in the *Earth*, or depoſited in a *Vault*. What I obſerve in others, I apply to my ſelf; and underſtanding by frequent Reflexions, that I perform the uſual functions of a living Creature, that my Bones are not lodg'd in the *Church-Yard*, that I Eat, Drink, Sleep, and Divert my Self, and (what I look upon as a moſt convincing Proof) that I am not yet rid of ſome very near, and boſome *Incumbrances* which are only ſhak'd off by Death. From all theſe *notorious Premiſes*, I draw this unavoidable Inference: *Ergo, I am not dead.* The fancies of *melancholly Tempers*, I own are very unaccountable, and ſeveral Splenatick Perſons have imagin'd themſelves remov'd into another World; but ſuch extravagant flights cannot ſtand in competition with a multitude of proofs which are ready to evidence their folly. Again, the Reaſons I have alledg'd to prove I am not dead, the ſame with due proportion will clear me from *Lunacy*; my bare aſſertion ſhall not be urged upon this head, becauſe Perſons under thoſe Circumſtances, not only imagin themſelves in *ſtatu quo*, but often in very rational, and coherent Words, will endeavour to make it out. I am willing to ſtand *mute*, and that a *Jury* of all Mankind ſhall bring in their *Verdict*, and if they declare me *compos*, I hope I may reſt ſatisfied that I am not mad.

As to the third Inſtance of the *Uncertainty of Man's State*: *Viz.* Whether we are aſleep, or awake, upon firſt view it appears to be as frivolous an Exception as either of the for-

mer; but upon a nearer approach, I find it is no easy matter to make that Discovery. Several rational Actions are perform'd in Dreams: I shall go no farther than my own Experience; that not only *Arguments*, *Orations*, Schemes of *Oeconomy*, *&c.* may be form'd in a Dream, but I have often found them more to the purpose, than those I have studiously set my Thoughts upon when awake. Now to give full satisfaction in this Point, it would be requisite to dilate upon the whole Doctrine of *Dreams*, but this will carry us too far from the matter in hand. I shall only take leave to observe, that the Soul in Sleep, does neither desert the Body, nor ramble over Mountains and Woods; nor is it render'd unactive, by being hinder'd from its usual Operations, during the stupefaction of Man's Sences. I own, I have no other *Idea* of a *Soul*, than of a Substance which is constantly fluttering in actual Cogitation; And tho' profound *Sleeping* seems to make against this Opinion, yet *Dreaming* re-establisheth it. When a Soul ceaseth to think, it ceaseth to be: I am always a thinking when I am asleep. What I dream of, I sometimes remember when awake, but the greatest part of *Night-Thoughts* are forgotten: *Sleep* is a kind of state of *Infancy*. Did we not always think when we were Children; Remembrance is separable from Thought, and 'tis manifest that the indispositions of Children's Bodies, is the only occasion of their not remembring what they think of during their tender Years. But not to dive at present any farther into this abstruse matter, I will conclude

clude it, with replying to one Inſtance which may be alledg'd againſt it; and it is this. If we always live in *actual Cogitation* both aſleep and awake, this Notion will inflame the difficulty; for how then ſhall we make the Diſcovery between being aſleep and awake? Certainly there is no other way to find it out, but from variety of Circumſtances, and a repetition of reflext Acts. 'Tis true, a Perſon ſometimes takes himſelf to be awake, when he is aſleep, but this miſtake will not bear a repetition of reflext Acts before the diſcovery is made. Again, tho' I were incapable my ſelf to make ſuch a diſcovery, others may do it, unleſs we ſuppoſe every Body aſleep at the ſame time. In a word, the circumſtances of Time, Place, the poſture of Man's Body, the nature of the Buſineſs he is imployed in, tho' now and then a Perſon may be deluded in them: Yet take things collectively, with all the variety of their Circumſtances, and the difference between thoſe two States is eaſily diſcover'd. I have ſaid enough upon this Subject, and had I not impoſed a Law upon my ſelf, not to ſlip the leaſt and moſt frivolous of your Remarks, he muſt certainly be a very good natur'd Reader that will pardon my Impertinence.

SECTION VI.

Certainty of the Sences.

Politician. I Perceive I have only given you a little Diverſion in my laſt Obſervations; but perhaps what I ſhall mention in the next place, will give you ſome trouble how to extricate your ſelf. In the firſt place I obſerve an original defect in the *Inſtruments* of Knowledge, which incapacitate Mankind from arriving at Certainty. The pendulous *Triumvarate* of *Sence*, *Reaſon*, and *Authority*, are my only Security. Now what can be more fallacious than my Sences, which I experience every Day do lead me into a thouſand Errors: My Eye is cheated as to the bulk of Celeſtial Bodies. When the *Tympanum* of my Ear is diſorder'd, I can hear Bells ring, and Seas roar, with other variety of Entertainments which have no Being. A fit of Sickneſs is capable to vitiate both my *Smell* and *Taſte*, whilſt the Sence of *Feeling* is liable to as many cheats and miſrepreſentations as a whimſical Brain is capable of. Theſe Inſtances of the Sences inſufficiency, I preſume, are regarded by the *Papiſts* as no deſpicable *Topick*, in the Doctrine of *Tranſubſtantiation*.

Divine. As I have engaged my ſelf to follow you; ſo you may depend upon it, I ſhall think it no trouble to humour you in any of your extravagant Digreſſions; and as for extricating

cating my ſelf, I flatter my ſelf to have laid ſuch a Foundation, that the Cauſe I maintain, will ſtand in need of no extraordinary *Orator* to dilate upon it. Now as to the uncertainty we are left in, by our Sences, which you in the firſt place inſiſt upon. Before I return a Specifick Anſwer, it will be convenient to premiſe an Obſervation or two, to give Light to ſeveral ſhort hints I ſhall not have time to dwell upon. As there is a great variety in *Aſſertions*, ſo there ought to be a variety in *Proofs*. No Proof has any force out of its own *Sphear*, but only in that Line, to which it is naturally adapted. 'Tis equally Impertinent to demand an Ocular Proof for the *Deity* or a Soul, as to attempt the meaſuring a Thought with a pair of Compaſſes, or deſcribring what colour the ſound of a Trumpet is. 'Tis not in the power of Man to give me a ſenſible Conviction that there was ſuch a Perſon as *Julius Ceſar*. What is *viſible*, *palpable*, and *preſent*, falls under the cognizance of Sence, but what is inviſible, and abſent, muſt come to my Knowledge by ſome other Method. There is a Sphear for *Reaſon* and *Authority*, no leſs than for Sence; and to call for Proofs of one kind, to make good the Aſſertions belonging to another, is to make no diſtinction between a *Brute*, and a *Rational Creature*; ſince the ſublimeſt Truths muſt be allowed of, or rejected, by no other Rule than what is common to Brutes; I mean the Tryal of Sence. This premiſed, I come to the difficulty you propoſed. To ſay the Sences never fail in repreſenting their Objects in their due Circum-

Circumſtances, is what was never pretended; but to infer from thence, that they are never to be relied upon, is a very unreaſonable deduction. All you can infer is, that the Sences are capable to lead Perſons into Miſtakes, when ſome falſe Medium obſtructs their Operation, or that a Perſon will not hearken to other Methods of Information, as *Reaſon*, *Authority*, *&c.* to correct the Miſtake. Shall we ſay that Mankind cannot diſtinguiſh between the braying of an *Aſs*, and one of *Nicholini*'s charming *Sonnets*; or betwcen a *Jigg* and a *Saraband*; becauſe here and there, a Perſon either happens to be Deaf, or wants a Muſical Ear to obſerve that diſtinction? No; the Sences are true Informers, where Ignorance, or ſome other Accident obſtructs them not. Again, the Teſtimony of the Sences is ſupported not only by a general, but by a particular Providence, in relation to thoſe things which regard Man's future Happineſs; and this we are oblig'd to ſay, unleſs we will make *Almighty God* forfeit one of his deareſt Attributes. However, to ſpeak nicely upon this Subject; it cannot be allowed that there is any Error in the Sences, not even occaſionally. Error is a defect of the Underſtanding, not of the *Eye*, *Tongue*, or *Ears*. 'Tis not the Painter's Pencil, but his Hand that ought to be blam'd, or rather his Judgment in not knowing how to direct them. So neither are our Sences to be traduced, but the Underſtanding, which ought to be Judge of the manner how Objects are applied. What the *Church of Rome* is able

to

to produce in favour of *Transubstantiation*, is not my present Concern. Nor were that Tenet true, will the *Papists* therefore lay aside the Testimony of the Senses. For, as I find it in their Writers, they are not unwilling to admit the Senses as good Judges, but not in opposition to Reason, and Faith. They produce many Instances of the former kind, and look upon *Transubstantiation* as an Instance of the latter.

SECTION VII.

Certainty of Reason.

Politician. I Am satisfied as to the former Article concerning the Senses, and that they being rather Instrumental than Active, no Mistake can properly lie at their door. But what Reply can you make to the fallacious Proceedings of what the World calls *Reason*; for if we look into this Affair nicely, we shall find *Reason* to be of very little Account in the pursuit of Certainty. If we speak of Civil Matters, every Man is qualified to stile the production of his own Brain *Reason* in opposition to all Mankind. And if we speak of Religious Matters, every one who makes a profession of *Christianity*, is under an obligation to sacrifice his Reason; as the Mysteries of the *Creation*, *Incarnation*, *Trinity*, *Resurrection*, &c. do make it evident.

Divine. *Reason* may either be taken for the *Faculty*, or the use of that *Faculty*. In the first Accep-

Acceptation, your Obſervation is true, that every Man has *Reaſon*. In the latter, only ſuch can lay claim to that *Appellation*, who make ſuch a uſe of the reaſoning Faculty, as to judge truly of thoſe Objects about which it is employed. I alſo agree with you, that in Civil and unrevealed Matters, every Man may innocently be a *Latitudinarian*, as to Opinion. Nor ought any Man's *Authority* upon ſuch Subjects, be of greater weight than the Reaſon he brings with him; yet this does not qualifie every Man to ſtile the production of his own Brain *Reaſon*, but only then when his Opinion is conformable to Truth. I own where *Religion* is concern'd, *Reaſon* cannot have that ſwing it enjoys upon other occaſions; yet it is ſo far from being Sacrificed, or Caſhier'd in the Myſteries of Religion, that it is then rais'd to a higher pitch, and fully employ'd, becauſe *it is highly reaſonable to believe many things are above Reaſon*; not only upon account of thoſe rational and undeniable Motives, which recommend *Chriſtianity*, but for many other peculiar Reaſons. Firſt to keep us in ſubjection, and from running into improper, and impertinent Enquiries, and again to give us an *Idea* of the infinite Majeſty of GOD, whom we ſhould be prompted to think meanly of, if we were capable to penetrate into every *Myſtery* he propoſes to us. I own Reaſon is loſt in the *Myſtery* of the *Trinity*, if it pretends to pry into the immediate *Texture* of that reveal'd Article, by attempting to account for the ſame thing being One, and Three. Yet

Reaſon

Reaſon is of ſingular uſe, whilſt it applies the *Motives of Credibility* to this, and other Myſteries, in order to render them credible, and undeniable; and this is certainly the nobleſt uſe Reaſon can be put to. I am not ignorant that the generality of *School-Divines* are willing to go ſomething farther, and pretend they may give greater allowances to *Reaſon*, by judging it capable to ſolve the *Objections* which may be rais'd againſt every particular *Myſtery*; but this ſeems too great a Complement. *Ex Nihilo nihil fit*, was an undoubted *Poſtulatum* with *Ariſtotle*, and hence he concluded, that the Creation of the World was a plain Contradiction. Now *School-Divines* are aſtoniſh'd at this *Philoſopher*'s ſtupidity, and think they have ſmother'd all the ſeeming Contradictions in the Creation, by a bare diſtinction of *Naturaliter Concedo, Supernaturaliter Nego.* 'Tis true, *Revelation* gives them an advantage above *Ariſtotle*; yet that diſtinction does neither explain the nature of the Myſtery, nor furniſh Solutions to what may be alledged againſt the *Creation.* In a word, you plainly ſee that reveal'd Truths are not contrary to Reaſon, tho' Reaſon be ſomething Eclips'd by their brightneſs. 'Tis not contrary to Reaſon that the *Loadſtone* ſhould attract *Iron*, conſtantly turn to the two Poles, *&c.* tho' no Man's Reaſon hitherto, cou'd juſtly account for thoſe ſurprizing *Phenomenons. Reaſon* therefore is capable to inform us aright, but if Men will put out their Eyes, 'tis no wonder they fall into *Precipices.*

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SECTION VIII.

Certainty of Authority.

Politician. I Will give you no further trouble upon this Head, but proceed to the next of my Scruples, which is concerning *Authority*. This muſt either be *Human*, or *Divine*. If *Human*, 'tis of known uncertainty. If *Divine*, tho' it may be certain in its ſelf, yet my method of yielding to this Authority, is *Human*, *Fallible*, and *inſufficient* to beget certainty; and this is manifeſt by ſo many different *Sects*, who ſubſcribe to contradictory *Tenets*, upon a motive of the ſame *Divine Authority*. Now though I ſhould give up the Cauſe ſo far, as to allow that ſome one of this noble *Triumvarate* could afford me certainty, I ſhould ſtill be at a loſs which to prefer, or to Judge how they ſtand in regard of one another. I know 'tis commonly ſaid that *Faith* (which is an' Aſſent grounded in Divine Authority) ought to enjoy a preheminence, both in regard of Sence and Reaſon. But this ſeems contrary to the Method of running up *Faith* to its original Motives. *Faith* depends upon the Information gven by *Sence* and *Reaſon*. For inſtance, I believe in Chriſt, upon the inducement of *Divine Authority*, yet it is by *Hearing* that I am bleſs'd with this Belief; and 'tis *Reaſon* that informs me I ought to give Credit to an Article ſo well atteſted. 'Tis plain therefore that *Faith* depends

depends originally upon *Sence*, which is liable to a thouſand miſtakes, and immediately upon *Reaſon*, which in other terms, is your Fancy, or mine, or what any Perſon can obſtinately aſſert, and plauſibly maintain. Beſides, if *Reaſon* is allowed the preference, ſo as to be the laſt *Reſort* of all Debates. This Notion will prove Fatal both to the *Reform'd Churches*, and to the *Church of Rome*, by putting them upon an *Enthuſiaſtical Footing*, whilſt one makes the *Scripture*, the other the *Church* ſubject to every Man's Private Reaſon.

Divine. Tho' I have already ſaid ſeveral things to this Point, where I touch'd upon the nature of *moral Certainty*, yet it will be neceſſary in this place, to ſpeak more diſtinctly; And in the firſt place, as to *Human Authority*; I own 'tis ſometimes of no account, but incredible, when a manifeſt Falſhood, or a Contradiction is aſſerted. Sometimes it is dubious, as when ſome Perſons aſſert a thing, and others deny it upon equal Terms. But then there is a *Human Authority*, which excludes all doubt. For *Inſtance*, when all *Hiſtorians* tell me there is ſuch a Place as *Rome*; all Hiſtorians agree there was ſuch a Perſon as *Julius Ceſar*. I have not the leaſt inclination to doubt of theſe Aſſertions, ſince no ſhadown of Reaſon can be alledg'd, why all the World ſhould conſpire in a Lye of that nature. I am not ignorant that ſeveral *Hereditary Miſtakes* are frequen tlydeliver'd by *Hiſtorians*; but then either the Miſtake has not been Univerſal, or there has been ſome occaſion given as a ground of ſuch Miſtakes;

ſtakes; as *Ignorance*, *Paſſion*, want of due Information, or ſome Private Deſign for miſrepreſenting Matters. The diſtinction you make between divine Authority, and the Application thereof, is neither improper, nor unſeaſonable; but you are in the wrong to allow nothing of Infallibility to the Application; for as I have more than once obſerv'd before, GOD's Providential Care requires a kind of Infallibility, or Certainty in the Means by which his Will is manifeſted to us, whether it be *Sence*, *Reaſon*, or *Authority*, and which he has ſufficiently provided us with by the threefold certainty I have eſtabliſhed; *Self-evident* in regard of firſt Principles; *Experimental* in regard of the objects of Sence, and *Moral or Prudential* in regard of Authority. But now you are apprehenſive leſt there ſhould be ſome jarring amongſt theſe Methods, and that a diſpute about Prerogative, will ruin the Power and Credit of this *Triumvarate*. 'Tis not to be queſtion'd, but the preference ought to be given to *Divine Authority*, or if you pleaſe, to *Faith*, which is an Aſſent grounded in that Authority, and that both Reaſon and Sence ought to ſubmit I own Faith depends both upon Sence and Reaſon originally, for the Reaſons you mention; but it does not follow from hence, that they have the Preference, or can ground a greater Certainty. Indeed, what you ſay makes it evident, that the Knowledge by Sence and Reaſon is *Prior* to that of *Faith*, and in this reſpect, *Faith* depends upon them. Yet this occaſional dependance does not argue they

glory

glory in a greater certainty, but only an infallible or ſufficient certainty to rely upon in Practice.

Perhaps you may conceive a difficulty how a greater Certainty can depend upon a leſs; but you muſt obſerve that the word *dependance* is equivocal, and not ſufficiently *expreſſive*; for by a greater Certainty depending upon a leſs, is only meant, that a leſs Certainty may ſometimes be an *Introduction* to a greater; as the *Maſter*'s Information is what the *Schollar* depends upon, tho' afterwards the *Schollar* often arrives at a more perfect Knowledge of things than the Maſter can pretend to. In the ſame manner, tho' *Faith* in ſome meaſure be built upon Sence and Reaſon, yet it far exceeds them in Certainty. And to look a little farther into this Enquiry. If we compare Sence with Reaſon, it ſeems evident that Reaſon is Umpire in all Debates between them two. For Inſtance, tho' my Eye informs me the *Sun* is no larger than a Diſh, I am not to acquieſce to this account, but to the Arguments of Reaſon produced by *Aſtronomers*, who tell us 'tis 160 times larger than the Earth. When my Sences declare to me that a Carpenter can build a Houſe with Timber and other Materials, I eaſily believe it, but when I am told that Things can be made out of Nothing; I ſhould give no credit to that ſurprizing Aſſertion, unleſs my *Reaſon* firſt inform'd me in general that there was a certain Infinite Being, capable to perform more than I was capable to comprehend; and that both the greateſt Authority and the moſt cogent Circum-

ſtances compell'd me to yield to that Aſſertion as to real Fact. But to proceed; If we compare Sence with Sence, and one Perſons Reaſon with another. In the Objects of Sence, indeed, there is very little diſagreement, but in comparing of Reaſons, there is nothing but claſhing; and what you have obſerv'd, is literally true, that every Man judgeth that to be Reaſon which he can but obſtinately aſſert, and plauſibly maintain; and this is the Source of that variety of Conteſts we meet with in all Arts, and Sciences, in all Matters both Civil and Religious. The Generality of the World are very much miſtaken in the *Idea* they frame of Reaſon. They take it to be a Thing in *Abſtracto*, Shining, Beautiful and Infallible in its Decrees; whereas 'tis only a particular way which every Man has to expreſs his own Humour, Intereſt, and Inclinations. Did Reaſon always lodge in a cool Head. Were it ſeparable from fancy and prejudice, it might lay claim to ſome of thoſe Charms, many are willing to aſcribe to it; but as it lies under the preſent diſadvantages, to ſay this, or that is againſt Reaſon, has no other meaning, than that it is again the Humor or Intereſt of a Perſon. Now to bring what Light I can to this intricate Matter, what I have to ſay is this. As long as every Man has the Liberty to think, and reaſon as he pleaſes, all ſeem to be upon the Level. But if either any one Man had the Skill to reduce particular Debates to firſt, and undeniable Principles; or a Deciſive Power were appointed to end Controverſies, as all Nations

tions agree there is in Civil Matters, and the Church of *Rome* asserts to be a Divine *Oeconomy* in Religious Matters, it would then be as notorious who was in the right, and who in the wrong in all sorts of Disputes, as that *twice two made four*. Again, this Method wou'd hinder the Inconvenience which you apprehend will prove fatal both to the Church of *Rome*, and the *Reform'd Churches*, *vid.* Enthusianism; whilst you affirm, that one Party makes the Church, the other the Scriptures subject to every Man's private Reason.

Now as I apprehend things, the difference stands thus between the *Church of Rome*, and others. In both Churches a Man's Reason which determines him is private; if we speak of the Act of the Understanding, assenting to such and such Tenets, But if Dr. *L*-----*y* be an Orthodox Expounder of the Reform'd Churches Doctrine, their Reason is not only Private as to the Act of Assenting, but also as to the Motive. For *Example.* A *Roman-Catholick* assents to the Doctrine of *Purgatory*, because the Church declares it is a reveal'd Article, and he believes the *Church* to be a true Informer, because of the Rational Motives which establish its private Authority. This latter Assent is Private, as it is an Act, but 'tis General as to the Motive; for as all agree, that *twice two make four*; so 'tis generally agreed, that Authority back'd by Supernatural Methods is unquestionable. Now in the Method Dr. *L*-----*y* puts the Reform'd Churches upon no External Authority, is decisive in re-

gard of any Queſtionable Tenet, and according to this Syſtem, Private Opinion merits that *Appellation*, both as to the Act of Aſſenting, as alſo with relation to the Motive; nor does it ſecure the Mind from Enthuſianiſm.

But I will illuſtrate this Point by a *Parallel Inſtance*. He that ſubmits himſelf to the Decrees of Parliament, becauſe his Reaſon tells him 'tis the Higheſt Court to finiſh all Debates; and he that makes his own Sentiments the Standard of Right and Wrong, do both in ſome Sence make their private Reaſon the laſt Reſort and Judge; in as much as both Aſſent to ſuch Opinions by a Private Act of the Underſtanding. But in one Caſe the Opinion is not Private as to the Motive, tho' it be in the other. And as one who ſuffers himſelf to be govern'd by the Authority of *Parliament*, cannot be ſaid to follow his own Fancy, or *Private Opinion*, ſo he that is directed by the *Church*, cannot be ſaid to make his Private Opinion his Rule. If I appear tedious upon this Article, 'tis to be attributed to the Nature of the Enquiry, which is in its ſelf ſomething intricate.

SECT.

SECTION IX.

Certainty of Ideas.

Politician. I Have hitherto been attentive with a ſingular pleaſure, nor can I grudge theſe Moments which are ſo well laid out. I muſt now put you upon a freſh Subject, which concerns the Nature of *Ideas*, and in which I do ſtill find my ſelf very much perplex'd. I ſhall not inſiſt upon the vulgar *Actioma* amongſt *Philoſophers*. *Nihil eſt in Intellectu quod prius non fuit in ſenſu.* I am content to paſs it over as a falſe Rule, upon account that there are certainly many *Innate Ideas* which have no dependence upon the Sences. Yet thus much muſt be acknowledg'd, that the main Bulk of what Knowledge Men pretend to, comes to them by means of the Sences. Now what I have to Object, is this. *The Sences are the Operations of the Organized Parts of Man's Body, by which the Ideas or Similitudes of External Objects are carried to the Soul.* Without a Body there cannot be Sence. Now in my manner of apprehending things, this muſt deſtroy all certainty which can be challenged by the Sences. For if I am not certain I have a Body, I cannot be certain I have Sence. Now that I am not only uncertain of the Exiſtence of my own Body, but even that I have no Knowledge at all of a Body, I make it out in this manner. Things that have no proportion to one ano-

ther, can never be united. The Socket and Screw muſt have the ſame Mouldings. A Body is extended into Parts, a Soul is a Spiritual Subſtance without Parts. A Soul cannot have the knowledge of a Body, unleſs the Body be exhibited to its preſence; and it has no way of being preſented to the Soul, but by the *Contactus* of its Parts: And the Soul having no Parts to anſwer or meaſure this *Contactus*, the Inference is, that the Soul can have no knowledge of a Body. If you alledge that a Body is not exhibited to the Soul only in its *Species* or *Idea*, the difficulty returns upon you; for I ſhall make farther demands concerning that *Idea*. Is it a Body, or a Spirit? If a Body, how can there be a *Contactus* between it and the Soul? If a Spirit, it cannot exhibit to the Soul the Nature and Properties of a Body. I have therefore no *Idea* of a Body.

Again, If all the *Ideas* we have of things are imperfect, and uncertain, we that form them, can have no certainty of what they repreſent. Let the Object be Sublime, or Familiar, Natural, or Supernatural, we are incapable to frame a juſt *Idea* of it. I ſubſcribe to the Exiſtence of a Deity, but I have no *Idea* either of his Nature, or Properties. All I can pretend to know, is that there is ſomething called by that Name. I have placed the *Trinity* amongſt my *Credenda*; but what this farther means beſides the word *Trinity*, I am altogether in the Dark. Nay even in obvious and ſublunary Things we labour under the ſame uncertainties. We hear without knowing what Sound is, See with-

without any *Idea* of Colours, and every Seed that is cover'd in the Earth, we behold it indeed ſprouting into Branches, Flowers and Fruit, but why it does not rot in the Earth, and never come to Maturity, we have only Matter of Fact to convince us. Nay; may we not juſtly ſay that what is call'd *Chriſtianity*, ſeems to contain no more Myſtery in it, in relation to *Ideas*, than what may be found in any Meadow or Garden; for does not a *Roſe* and the *Trinity* both appear incomprehenſible.

Divine. I perceive your Scruples begin to multiply very faſt, and this your laſt objection touches upon a Point, which tho' ſeldom look'd into, yet I take it to be a very deep Myſtery, and a piece of management which calls for all our ſubtilty and attention. The inexplicable union of the Soul and Body, and the dependance they have upon each other, with the incapacity you mention of the Souls having any Knowledge or *Idea* of a Body, having hitherto been a Task for many fruitleſs Labours. What I have to ſay upon the matter, is this: 'Tis true, the Sences depend upon the Body, and as to their Certainty, they muſt ſtand or fall by it. It muſt likewiſe be granted, that there is ſuch a natural diſproportion between Thought and Body, or an extended Subſtance, that it is a Myſtery how they can affect each other, either by way of Object, or Motion. The apprehenſion of this difficulty, has occaſion'd ſome Philoſophers to aſſert, that Bodies could not be moved immediately, and phyſically, only by GOD that Created them. So that it

appears from this Syſtem, as impoſſible for a Man's Soul to move his own Body, as to remove a Caſtle by a Thought or Wiſh, as alſo to frame any *Idea* of a Body, for this can be no otherwiſe effected then by joyning it to the Soul, either really, or in its Species, both which Objects as you do very well obſerve, being material or extended Subſtances, the difficulty of knowing a Body is not taken away, but revived under more intricate Circumſtances. But to ſpeak more diſtinctly to this obſcure matter, and to declare in a few Words how I can be certain I have a Body. In the firſt place, for the Reaſons juſt now mention'd, I cannot pretend to have an abſolute or *Metaphyſical Certainty* that I have a Body; but yet I have a high *Moral Certainty* which excludes all doubting, and which may be eaſily run up to a *Metaphyſical Certainty*. The method of that Certainty ſtands thus, I have an abſolute and *Metaphyſical Certainty* that I have a Soul: The Exiſtence of my Soul evidenceth the Being of a *Deity*: From the Exiſtence of a *Deity* I infer a Religion: Afterwards I find my ſelf obliged to acknowledge Revelation. This informs me that I am to be made happy by ſeveral Actions which depend upon a Body. *Ergo* GOD has provided me with a Body, to make me capable of complying with ſuch Actions. This perhaps may ſeem to be going about the Buſh; but in eſtabliſhing a *Moral Certainty*, which generally depends upon variety of Circumſtances, we can follow no other Method. To confirm this, you may if you pleaſe, take

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in the general Conſent of all Mankind, who agree there are ſuch things as Bodies. Now a general Conſent, without any diverſity of Opinion, is ſufficient to ground the ſtrongeſt *Moral Certainty*. To let the difficulty therefore ſleep for the preſent, how the Soul and Body can act with that Uniformity upon ſo manifeſt a diſproportion, and to yield up that part of the Controverſy, that the Soul can have no *Idea* of a Body, nor by Conſequence, have any *Metaphyſical Certainty* of its Exiſtence, it is ſufficient to my preſent purpoſe, that I have eſtabliſh'd the Exiſtence of Bodies, in ſuch a manner, that no Perſon will pretend to call them into queſtion, or can poſſibly doubt of their Exiſtence.

I now come to the obſcurity of *Ideas*, which, as it is an Argument of the uncertainty of things, as to their manner, ſo 'tis an evident demonſtration of Certainty as to their Subſtance or Exiſtence. 'Tis however a Truth beyond Controverſy, that we can neither have an *Idea* which is capable to repreſent revealed Myſteries, nor a perfect *Idea* of the Myſteries; nay, nor of the obvious and vulgar Operations of Nature. As to revealed Myſteries; we know for Example, that the World was Created or Made out of Nothing; but we have no *Idea* of what Creation is, beſides an inward Conviction that there is ſuch a Thing. In like manner, we have no *Idea* of a *Deity*, a *Soul*, of the *Trinity*, *&c.* yet we are obliged to aſſent to what is revealed concerning them, and tho' I cannot frame an *Idea* of the ſame thing being one, and three, yet

yet I muſt believe it is ſo in ſome manner or other, and I am to ſubſcribe to it in the ſame *Tenour* of Words it is propoſed to me. This is a method to be obſerv'd, both in regard of natural and reveal'd Objects, where the *Modus* is commonly ſubſcribed to upon a Conviction, without any *Idea*, and the Subſtance upon a very imperfect *Idea*. For Inſtance, the *Continuation* of Bodies is a very palpable Truth but their *Diviſibility*, is a Myſtery we can have no *Idea* of. *Local Motion* is perceptible to every Eye, but the *Modus* puzzl'd *Zeno* ſo much, as almoſt to contradict the evidence of his Eyes, and plain Fact. What is more known than the *Electric force* of ſeveral Bodies, and yet who can pretend to have an *Idea* of their *Phenomena*'s. In fine, I am fully convinced I have both a Soul and a Body, tho' I am in the dark as to moſt of their Properties. Now if Nature lies ſo conceal'd from us as to moſt of its Properties, tho' we have a kind of *Idea* of its Exiſtence; why may we not have a general and ſatisfactory *Idea* of the Exiſtence of a GOD, *Creation*, *Trinity*, *&c.* without concerning our ſelves about a perfect *Idea*, which no Mortal ought to expect in this Life, upon many accounts. But to penetrate a little farther into this matter: All theſe pretended Scruples are eaſily removed, by aſſigning a diſtinction between an obſcure *Idea*, and a clear *Idea*; an *adequate* or *comprehenſive Idea*, and an *inadequate* or *imperfect Idea*. GOD alone has an adequate comprehenſive *Idea* of any of his Creatures, becauſe only that Hand which fram'd and graſps the

the World, is capable to take all its dimenſions. But an imperfect *Idea* (which is more properly term'd a Conviction) of the Exiſtence of Things, and of ſeveral of their Properties, is what cannot reaſonably be denied to Rational Creatures. And here I agree with you, that Nature is myſterious, as well as Revelation, yet I dare not mention your Atheiſtical Compariſon, to make a *Roſe* as great a Myſtery as the *Trinity*. 'Tis true, a Roſe has many Properties in Smell, Colour, *&c.* which Nature cannot comprehend, but the GOD of Roſes has many more. The Author of *Chriſtianity not myſterious*, draws ſuch Parallels as theſe, upon a ſuſpected deſign of deſtroying reveal'd Religion with an *innuendo*, as if we lay under no greater an Obligation to believe a *Trinity*, than any natural Myſtery. But beſides the baſeneſs of ſuch Similitudes, there is certainly a remarkable inequality as to the precept. Queſtionleſs it was in GOD's power to have obliged us to an aſſent in regard of the Myſteries of Nature, as well as of thoſe he has reveal'd; but as there was no occaſion for ſuch kind of Injunctions, ſo we are ſtill free upon that Head; and have no other tye upon us, than what the common Dictates of Nature impoſeth upon us, in giving Credit to many things we don't comprehend: And if we diſſent, we incur no other guilt than that of Folly, or at the moſt, make our ſelves violaters of the Precept, *Thou ſhalt not Lye*, in which the Divine veracity is not ſo immediately

ately concern'd, as in Reveal'd Truths, where he acts under a more eminent Character.

SECTION X.

Certainty of Principles.

Politician. A Matter eſſentially obſcure, is not capable of ſuch Satisfaction as I could deſire; and the nature of *Ideas* has always been look'd upon as a torture to Men of the greateſt Penetration. However, what you have alledg'd has fully perſwaded me, that an obſcure *Idea* is able to afford Conviction, and eſtabliſh Certainty, which is the main drift of our preſent Deſign. But I have ſeveral doubts of another kind to lay before you: I ſhall not inſiſt upon that general Ignorance which overſpreads all Mankind, of which, three parts are but one remove from *Brutes* in point of Knowledge. They are perhaps particularly acquainted with a multitude of Cauſes and Effects, but not ſeeing their Connexion, all they go upon is mere Cuſtom and Habit, as Parrots, and other tractable Birds learn Languages. The Mariner obſerves his *Tyde*, without looking into the wonders of the Flux and Reflux of the *Ocean*. Nor do ſuch as all Winter long receive the benefit of the Fire, either impeach *Ariſtotle*, for eſteeming Heat a quality inherent to Fuel,

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or *Carteſius*, who makes it only a Senſation occaſion'd by the Particles of Fuel. Now if you pretend that only the ignorant part of Mankind are careleſs in looking into the Original Cauſes of things, but that you have *Univerſities* and *Seats* of Learning, which abound with Men of ſingular acuteneſs and experience. That theſe have a little more Curioſity than the vulgar, and that they are not only able to give Reaſons for the moſt ſurprizing *Phenomenons* of Nature, but have brought things into ſuch a method, that even Children are inſtructed in infallible Rules, how to give ſatisfaction in moſt of thoſe pretended Myſteries: Theſe Rules are call'd *Sciences*, and known by the general Name of *Philoſophy*, of which there are ſeveral Species, *Geometry*, *Aſtronomy*, *Phyſick*, *&c.* Theſe, as 'tis pretended, do lay down undeniable *Principles* or *Poſtulata*'s which will lead a Man to Certainty in many particular and more remote Inquiries. But either I am unfortunate in my Obſervations, or what Men call undeniable Principles, are nothing elſe but *bold*, *obſtinate Aſſertions*, which are maintain'd and denied with equal aſſurance. Otherwiſe, whence proceeds all the claſhing amongſt *Philoſophers*, even in *Principles*? Whilſt one Man is triumphing, and hugging a pretended demonſtration, another ſtarts up, and will not allow his demonſtration to be common Sence. Is there any thing advanced by one Man, but another is ready to gainſay it? and this not for Diverſion, or out of Humour, but upon a real Perſwaſion. What is become

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of that infallible *Poſtulatum* of *Ariſtotle*, the Prince of *Philoſophers? Ex nihilo nihil fit:* It led him upon the erroneous Inference, of concluding the World to be without a Beginning. And ſince his Days, a *Principle* originally deſign'd to have no limitation, is now confin'd, only to the *verge* of Second Cauſes. To *Carteſians*, Matter capable of Senſation, is an inſupportable *Syſtem* of Nonſence; but *Chriſtian Peripateticks* are for impeaching the *Aſſertors* of a contrary Doctrine of madneſs, and ſometimes threaten them with the Inquiſition. *Matter* and *Form*, with ſome, are the *Baſis* of all Nature's *Oeconomy*; and yet the moſt ingenious parcel of Mankind, will allow them to be only two *Notional Principles*. What can be more convincing to the Eye, than that the *Earth* ſtands ſtill, and yet the World is no ſtranger to thoſe Perſon's Ingenuity, who aſcribe a continual motion to it. Mankind, was not many Years ago, in Poſſeſſion of an eſtabliſh'd Notion that the Blood did not circulate, but at preſent they acknowledge their miſtake, upon the remonſtrance of the ingenious Dr. *H---y*. Now, if moſt Diſtempers lie in the Blood (as 'tis commonly believed) this new Syſtem of the Circulation, muſt give an entire turn to the medicinal Art, and put it upon another Footing; which alſo has no farther Security, till a *Modern Hypocrates* ſtart up to ſubvert more of its *Fundamentals*. But then you come upon me with your *Mathematical Triangles*, which muſt of neceſſity have three Corners; with *your two and two makes four*, and ſuch-like undeniable

undeniable Aſſertions and Principles, which at once trip up the heels of *Scepticiſm*. I own theſe Propoſitions appear undeniable, but then they are uſeleſs; for if you advance a ſtep forward, in order to draw Inferences, your *Obſcurity* will occaſion my *Doubt*. Beſides, I am told by *Carteſius*, and ſeveral other Eminent Philoſophers, that tho' *twice two appear to me to be four*, 'tis not manifeſt but GOD may make *twice two to be five*. And how can I tell but my Reaſon may be impoſed upon in this, as my Sences are actually impoſed upon in the dimenſions of the Celeſtial Bodies? What Security then have we Mortals to adhere to Inferior Truths, when general Notions and Principles are ſo Changeable?

Divine. You might have ſpared part of the Trouble you have given your ſelf. We are all perſwaded that certainty is not to be ſought for amongſt the *Ignorant* and *Stupid* part of Mankind. I am alſo willing to allow that three Parts in four of the World are not able to give a true Account of what Nature every day exhibits to our Sences. But whilſt you are pleas'd to expoſe the Ignorance of ſome, you ſeem to own at the ſame time, there are other Perſons in the World who have made a noble and ſatisfactory Progreſs in thoſe Enquiries you mention; as in many other things in which Men of Wit, and induſtrious Curioſity in all Ages and all Nations have been ſucceſsfully buſied. The Flux and Reflux of the Ocean, is a ſtupendious and Majeſtick Miracle of Nature, conceal'd indeed from the *Drudging Mariner*, but now grown

grown familiar to many Inquisitive Persons; who comparing its Alterations with the increase and decrease of the *Moon*, have very feasibly made it out, that the pressure of that Body upon its Surface, does occasion that Regular Alteration; and from the variety of Winds, and bendings of Channels, they do very plausibly reconcile some of the *Mediterranean* Tydes, which sometimes seem to vary from the motion of the Moon. Again, tho' it wou'd not be seasonable to disturb the Pleasure of a Winter Nights Conversation, by endeavouring to untie these knotty Questions concerning the Nature and Properties of Heat and Fire; and tho' neither *Aristotle*, nor *Cartesius* did hit the Mark in their Observations upon that Subject, yet their Followers since have so agreed upon the Matter, and have placed that Controversie in so proper a Light, that *Cartesians* are willing to say in Discourse, that Fire is Hot. And *Aristotelians* are no less willing to think it is Cold. *Loqui cum multis & sapere cum paucis*, is a convenient Rule upon several occasions. *Cartesius* and his Disciples had Wit and Judgment to overthrow an Hereditary mistake, but they wanted Authority to Coin a a new Language; and we must still make use of the old *Mumpsimus*, and say that Fire is hot, tho' it be only occasionally so. The Ignorance therefore of many in the World can be no prejudice towards establishing certainty amongst those, who with both great Trouble and Charge do Comment upon the Works of Nature, not only by bare and useless Speculations,

ons, but from General Principles draw Practical Inferences, and by degrees make those Truths palpable, which before were only conceiv'd in *Ideas*, and lapt up in *Embrios*; in which kind of Improvements several of our Northern *Chymists* have been very successful. You see then that the Methods by which some Men arrive at Science, are not as you traduce them, so many *Learned ways of knowing nothing*. You may be sensible that *Principles* are not only obstinate Assertions, but Truths consecrated by Nature for the General Improvement of Mankind. However, I will not deny but there is great clashing amongst *Philosophers*, and that what one Man would make pass as a *Demonstration*, another won't allow to be common Sense. But this jarring is not to be met with in *Principles*, only in Remoter Matters, where Men of Wit have room to play, and divide themselves into Parties, as they are seduced by *Humors*, *Interest*, *Passion*, *Education*, &c. neither do the Examples you alledge, prove any more than what I here acknowledge. But that all Evasions, and Opportunities of a Reply may be cut off, it will be requisite to distinguish between two sorts of *Principles*. *First Principles*, which all Mankind allow of, and *Party Principles*, which only a Set of People allow of. I have elsewhere made it evident there can be no jarring in *first Principles*. Now as for *Party Principles*, tho' they ought to be undeniable to such as pay respect to them; yet 'tis plain by the very import of their Name, that there are some who make it their business to oppose them.

Now those Principles you have mention'd are of this latter kind. For it was never pretended, That *ex nihilo nihil fit.* The *Sensitive Souls of Animals*, *Matter and Form.* The *Earths Immobility*, or *the Stagnation of the Blood were first Principles, undeniable*, and as manifest as that *two and two made four*, or that the whole was bigger than the part. On the contrary, they carry nothing of Conviction in their forehead, but often have been, and still are rejected by Persons of the best understanding. 'Tis no wonder then if Certainty cannot be infallibly found in Points wherein the World has so much grounds to be divided. But to touch upon each Particular. 'Tis true, the Principle *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, if we step not out of the Precincts of Nature, will approach near to a first Principle. But because we are able to give no other account of the World's Existence but by *Creation*, it destroys that Principle in a general acceptation. And in this *Aristotle* would have joyn'd with us, had he been bless'd with the advantageous helps of Revelation as we are. The *Sensation of Animals*, is an Opinion more owing to Antiquity and want of Reflection, than to Reason. Some of the Ancients deny'd it; those that maintain'd it, enquir'd little into it, end even at this day many plausible Reasons are brought *Pro* and *Con*, which is a certain Token of its not being a *first Principle*, but only an Inference. *Matter and Form*, I own are Principles amongst *Aristotle*'s Followers, but so far from being self-evident or first Principles, that the vulgar way of explaining those

thoſe two Original Cauſes of Nature is altogether unintelligible. For what can be more unaccountable, than to mention that as a *clear Principle*, which Men have no other *Idea* of, than what is ſignified by thoſe inexpreſſive words; *Matter is neither quid, quale, nor quantum, but a pura Potentia to be what you pleaſe; or in other words, it is neither Something, nor Nothing; and again, that its Individual Conſort Forma Subſtantialis, is the Actus Primus of that thing called Matter.* Thus you ſee Principles which ought be as clear as a Ray of the Sun, are nothing but Confuſion, and Darkneſs. But 'tis not my Buſineſs at preſent to look any farther into this Affair; 'tis ſufficient that the claſhing of *Philoſophers* in relation to Matter and Form is not about firſt Principles. The *Immobility of the Earth* is what the Eye ſeems to demonſtrate. But again, the Eye is no proper Judge. Motions that are either very ſwift, or very ſlow, are both imperceptible to the Eye, as 'tis remarkable in the Finger of a Clock, and the Motion of the Sun, in their *Syſtem*, who deſcribe it to be a moving Body. Why may not then the Earth be in a continual Motion, and we the Inhabitants be inſenſible of it? I do not pretend to lean to either Party, or determine a Cauſe in a few ſhort hints, which has long been unſucceſsfully diſcus'd in many large Volumes. The only thing I am here concern'd in is, that neither Syſtem can lay claim to the Privilege of a firſt and undeniable Principle. The *Circulation of the Blood* is another Inſtance, by which you would ſhew the uncer-

tainty that is in *Arte Medicinali.* Shou'd I ſay no demonſtrations can be form'd in order to Cure a Diſtemper, 'tis what is the Truth of the Matter. This *Employment* is not ſtrictly a Science, but only a Mechanical Art, and is the ſame in regard of the Body, what a Plaiſterer is in regard of a Building. A Phyſician may Mend and Prop Nature, but a thouſand Accidents occur hourly to baffle all his Experiments. The Syſtem of the Circulation of Blood, is of ſingular uſe in Phyſick, and may reſpectively be term'd a kind of Principle, but not a firſt Principle. What you alledge in the laſt place, would indeed prove the thing you aim at, *vid.* a diſſenſion, and uncertainty as to firſt Principles, if upon any occaſion a Perſon could doubt of a *Triangle*, having three Corners, or *that twice two made four.* You ſtrengthen your Suſpicion, by affirming with *Carteſius*, and ſome others, that you are not fully ſatisfied, but that ſupernaturally two and two may be five. I own GOD can perform ſeveral things, which to us do appear plain Contradictions; but to impoſe upon us in thoſe *Original Notions* and *Ideas*, is what his Divine Attributes will not permit him to do, nor dare I venture to ſay with *Carteſius*, that ſuch an Impoſition is poſſible. If my Eye is impoſed upon in taking the Dimenſions of the Celeſtial Orbs (which yet is an improper Speech) my Reaſon which is capable to rectifie that Miſtake, is not impoſed upon. Particular Perſons may be permitted to live in ſome Deluſions, both as to their Senſes and Reaſon in puniſhment of their Sins. But

for

for GOD to Create all Men with Notions originally wrong, and which are to direct him in all occurrences of Life, is to unman us, and to ſuppoſe us not to be Rational. GOD as I ſaid before, can do, and has done ſeveral things which appear Contradictions. But if the plaineſt Rules he lays before us were real Contradictions, a Man and a Brute would be the ſame thing; for a Man is no longer a Man, but as he is capable to diſtinguiſh between Good and Bad, Right and Wrong. In a word, 'tis not being endowed with a Rational Soul, that diſtinguiſheth between a Man and a Beaſt, if a Man's Notions are Brutiſh and undiſtinguiſh'd. I conclude therefore that firſt Principles are unchangeably true, and that twice two are as certainly four, as GOD is good to his Creatures, and as certainly as that a Man is not a Brute. And now you may proceed to the reſt of your Scruples.

SECTION XI.

Certainty of Inferences.

Politician. I Acquieſce to your Arguments by which you have eſtabliſh'd the certainty of firſt Principles: But this granted, with what ſecurity can I rely upon remote and foreign Deductions? The World is ſcandalouſly divided in all the Inferences they make. *Do as*

you would be done by, is the grand Source of *Morality*, the *Prime Regulator* of Right and Wrong, but the Concluſions deduced from thoſe Noble Premiſes, are, commonly ſpeaking, nothing but *Knavery* and *Oppreſſion*. *Cook* upon *Littleton* is of no uſe, where *Arbitrary Power* is to finiſh the Debate. A Superiority in Power ſeldom is at a loſs for a Reaſon for what they do, tho' *State Inferences* have often little or no connexion with the Premiſes. What an unaccountable variety of *Syſtems* does the Ancient and Modern Philoſophy exhibit to the World? Nations are ſometimes at Peace as to their Territories, but never as to their Opinions. Upon all occaſions there is Bill and Anſwer, Objecting and Proving, Affirming and Denying, Doubting and Enquiring, has been the conſtant Drudgery of all Mankind ſince the Creation. I am not ignorant there is a Science called *Logick*, which is chiefly intended to inform the World how to arrive at Certainty in *Inferences* by an infallible Rule call'd a *Demonſtration*; which in ſhort is a *neceſſary Inference drawn from undeniable Premiſes or Principles*. Now ſuppoſing the Premiſes to be unqueſtionable, unleſs the Connexion betwixt them and the Inference be evident, it ſtill leaves Matter of doubt, and can ground neither Demonſtration, nor Certainty. And this my Obſervation is made good by daily Practiſe. What is evident, cannot be denied, and yet what is a demonſtration to one Man, is none to another; and why? becauſe the Inference is obſcure and uncertain. A Spiritual Subſtance which conceives Objects by

by an intuitive Knowledge, without drawing *Inferences*, may be certain of their Nature and Properties; but it does not appear that we *Sublunary Mortals* enjoy that Privilege.

Divine. The uncertainty of many *Inferences* is what I cannot deny, even through the whole Courſe of Natural Cauſes. For tho' firſt and *General Principles* be undeniable, as grafted by GOD himſelf in Man's Nature, to diſtinguiſh him from a Brute, and put him in a Capacity to arrive at the End for which he was deſign'd. And tho' many *Second Rate* and *Party-Principles* be clearly deduced from General ones, and conſecrated to the uſe and benefit of every reſpective *Art* and *Science*, yet when Men come to draw their Inferences, *Intereſt*, *Paſſion* and *Education*, &c. ſo blind and overſway their Judgment, that Truth and Certainty are ſeldom found out, and agreed upon in remote Matters. From this Source do take their riſe all the Diviſions both in Church and State. Hence ſprung up the *Jew* and *Atheiſt*, *Heretick*, and *Schiſmatick*, *Stoick* and *Epicurean*, *Thomiſt* and *Scotiſt*, *Carteſian* and *Ariſtotelian*, *Round-Head* and *Cavalier*, *Whig* and *Tory*, *Jacobite*, and *Williamite*, *High-Church* and *Low*, *Free-Thinker*, and *Bottomiſt*, &c. In fine, the numerous Armies of *Pro*'s and *Con*'s take their riſe from this one *Origin*, that *Ignorance, or Paſſion will not ſuffer Men to draw certain and undeniable Inferences, from certain and undeniable Premiſes.* Theſe Debates are firſt laid in corrupted Nature, and taking fire, are carried through the *Schools*, *Pulpits*, *Parliaments*, &c. till they

end in the *Field*, by cutting of Throats. However, if it were not an unavoidable Curſe entail'd upon the Sons of *Adam*, that they ſhould never agree, we might (prejudices laid aſide) make very ſucceſsful Attempts in guiding our ſelves through the *Labyrinths* of Nature, and by finding the end of ſeveral of her *Bottoms*, patiently unravel them. In this manner *Plato* found a *Deity* in his *Ideas*, *Galen* in *Anatomy*, and *Ariſtotle* in *Motion*; each one running up the particular Inferences of his reſpective Art and Science to the *Spring-Head*. 'Tis true, *Libraries* are a ſtanding Record of *Scepticiſm*, and what uncertainty there is in theſe remote Controverſies. So is *Weſtminſter-Hall* able to give Teſtimony, that the Wiſeſt *Senate* cannot word *Laws* ſo as to place them above the reach of Cavil. But when a Tryal is ended, either by a definitive Sentence, according to Statute, or by Arbitration, 'tis an evident Token that there are Methods of drawing certain Inference when Paſſion and Prejudice are laid aſide, and that the Channel of Truth lies open and free. And this may be obſerv'd, both in regard of *Civil* and *Eccleſiaſtical* Controverſies, as alſo in all the Debates ariſing from the obſcurity of Natural Cauſes. Now as to what you alledge farther concerning *Logick*. I do not pretend that Inferences which are drawn by that Science, can carry an equal certainty with the *Premiſes*, becauſe the *Medium* is often not ſufficiently evident; or if it is, the Perſon who makes the Inference, may lie under ſome Incapacity, and not diſcover the Connection

nection between the *Premiſes* and the *Concluſion*. I ſhall not loſe my Time in alledging many Examples where Inferences may be ſometimes Infallible, and again Uncertain. What I pretend is, that ſometimes an *Inference* may be undeniable, and very little inferior to a firſt *Principle*; as in the following Example, where both Premiſes are unconteſtable. *What Thinks, Exiſts or has a Being. But I Think.* Ergo *I have a Being.* This Inference cannot be denied, and what we call *Logick*, preſcribes Rules for making ſuch *Inferences*. Yet at the ſame time I own, that what often appears a *Demonſtration* to one Man, is none to another; but tis either where the *Premiſes* are ill laid, or where the uſual impediments of *Education*, *Paſſion*, &c. do intervene to the Managers of ſuch demonſtrations. What you add concerning the knowledge of Spirits. If I have any notion of a Spirit, they have no occaſion to make Inferences, or know one thing by another; and tho' Men in this Life cannot lay claim to that Privilege univerſally, in regard of all Objects, yet in regard of firſt *Principles*, their Condition ſeems to be equal to that of Spirits. You ſee therefore, that tho' the number of *Logicians* may perhaps be juſtly abridg'd, whilſt many *Pretenders* attempt to draw Conſequences from unwarrantable *Premiſes*, and top them upon the World for *Demonſtrations*; yet *Logick* in the main, is a certain Method of arriving at Truth, and capable to make us give an aſſent without heſitation, or doubt, to many remote Inferences.

SECT.

SECTION XII.

Hiſtorical Certainty.

Politician. MY next Scruple runs upon the uncertainty of *Hiſtorical Credit.* I am willing to acknowledge my own frailty, and that others far ſurpaſs me in the way of Knowledge; and upon this account, rely upon what others relate, when I find my ſelf incapable to arrive at the Truth. But who are thoſe that are capable to inform me truly, of what paſt in former *Ages*, when I was not a *Spectator?* There was a Time before Letters was invented, and then the World wanted a method of conveying Facts to Poſterity. Perhaps the uſe of *Hieroglyphicks* was appropriated by ſome Nations to ſupply that defect; but their ſignification was ſo very equivocal, that it cou'd afford nothing but a confuſed Notion of Things without circumſtances. *Moſes* (who is taken to be the *Cadmus* Inventor of the *Alphabet*) gives a ſhort account of the *Antediluvian Story*; but He living after the Flood who were his Informers or Cotemporaries to ſtrengthen his Narrations: None but his own Nation and Followers back what he relates in the *Pentateuch.* Why do not the *Heatheniſh Writers* take notice of the remaining part of the Bible? But in caſe they did, 'tis remarkable that the

Grecian

Grecian Story abounds with Lyes and Fictions; and the *Romans* borrowed from them, and ſo the whole *Jewiſh Hiſtory* ſtands upon a very ſlippery Foundation. Neither is this misfortune peculiar to the *Sacred Story*: Hiſtory in General is ſubject to a thouſand defects which take off its Credit. A Lye, or Miſinformation, drops as eaſily from the Pen, as from the Lips; don't we find by Experience, that a Story needs only take a very ſhort Voyage to have remarkable additions? What a Sufferer then muſt Truth be, when it paſſeth through ſo many Ages and careleſs Hands, from remote parts of the World? *Hiſtorians* ſeldom view *Original Records*, or are *Spectators* of what they Write. They flatter their *Friends*, and unjuſtly charge their Enemies: They relate in fine, not ſo much what others did, as what they themſelves think of their doings.

Divine. I expected you would inſiſt upon this *Topick*, to which I make this ſhort Reply. I cannot diſown but there is great uncertainty in *Hiſtory*, yet ſince we have no other method of knowing what paſs'd in former *Ages*, and that the happineſs God has deſign'd Men for (as to the methods of arriving at it) is attainable no other way, 'tis a neceſſary *Appendix* of his *Divine Attributes*, that he provide us with ſome ſecurity in this reſpect, which tho' he might effect by the way of *Special Revelation* to every private Perſon, yet we know this is not the method he has pitch'd upon. *Hiſtory* therefore under ſome reſpect, muſt be a certain and infallible Rule. By *Hiſtory*, I do not only

mean

mean what is ſtrictly ſo call'd, as if nothing could challenge that name but what is commited to writing: Facts may be deliver'd by word of Mouth, no leſs than by Writing; but ſince moſt Facts of Conſequence, are ſooner or later Penn'd down, I ſhall not raiſe an unneceſſary Conteſt upon this account, but ſhall ſpeak of Hiſtory, as of a *written Conveyance*. Now to come to the particular Inſtances of *Hiſtorical Uncertainty* you think fit to mention: You begin with the *Antediluvian Story*, during which time you ſuppoſe there were no Letters to perpetuate Facts, and convey them to Poſterity. According to the niceſt Computation; that run of Time before the *Deluge* amounted to 1656 Years; and as it was a large Tract of Time to People the World, and improve it in Arts and Sciences, ſo it has by ſome ingenious Perſons been made appear, that the Earth was as well Peopled before the Flood, as it is at Preſent, and hence we may reaſonably infer, that either Letters, or ſome other Art now forgotten, flouriſhed amongſt the *Antediluvians*, for the tranſmitting of things to Poſterity: Or if you pleaſe, Things might be convey'd by *Tradition*, as now ſeveral Arts are communicated without Letters, as *Painting*, *Speaking by Signs*, *&c.* But to return to *Moſes*, I own he is the firſt who mentions the World's Creation, and the *Antediluvian Story*, and as to the way he came to the knowledge of thoſe things at ſo great a diſtance of Time, tho' ſome think the Narration was given him by Revelation, yet I am of Opinion, there is no occaſion

occaſion to have recourſe to that method; for it will be found by comparing Men's Lives, that *Moſes* might have that Relation from thoſe who were perſonally acquainted with *Abraham*, *Abraham* received it from *Noah*, and *Noah* had the ſatisfaction to hear it from the mouth of *Adam* himſelf, the Origin of Mankind. The Tradition therefore of the World's Creation came to *Moſes*, by a regular, and very ſhort Conveyance. 'Tis true, *Moſes* was the firſt and only one of his days that relates the Story; as all *Hiſtories* muſt have ſome firſt Publiſher, and if *Moſes* was the firſt Inventor of Letters, 'tis no wonder that none of his Cotemporaries publiſh'd what he did. However the Story of the Bible may be found in ſeveral particulars, amongſt the Heatheniſh Writers, tho' mangled for want of a perfect Information. Nor can this appear ſtrange, ſince it was a Crime amongſt the *Jews*, to have a Communication with any Neighbouring Nation. Thoſe Scraps of Hiſtory which the antient *Heathens* had upon occaſions ſtol'n from the *Jews*, were conſecrated by them in Poems, and other Fabulous Narrations. Thus *Ovid's Chaos* marks out the ſtate of the World before the Creation, as it is deſcribed in the beginning of *Geneſis*. *Noah* was *Ogyges*, and his Flood the *Deluge*; Again *Noah* was *Saturn* with his three Sons, and ſometimes he is *Janus* with his two Faces, looking before and after the Deluge. The Garden of *Heſperides* with the Golden Apple, is *Paradiſe*, and the forbidden Fruit. *Nimrod* was *Belus*: *Jephte* was *Agamenon*

menon Sacrificing *Iphigenia*, with many other Circumſtances, which are very applicable, and which make it pretty evident, that the Story of the Bible was confirm'd by Strangers, as far as they were permitted to come to the Knowledge of ſuch things. Neither can the Fabulous *Grecians*, or *Romans*, who borrow from them, render theſe things leſs credulous, for tho' they might take a liberty in the manner of relating Matters, and mingle a thouſand fictions with Truth, yet the viſible ſimilitude of the *Jewiſh Story*, with the Subſtance of the *Heatheniſh Fables*, ſhews that Truth was the ground-work of their *Poetical Flights*. The Parallel you draw between writing and ſpeaking Lyes, is very juſt, for in both caſes, Facts are often miſrepreſented; but this ought not to take away the Credit of *Hiſtory*, but only make the *Reader* Cautious. 'Tis indeed a rare thing, to find an *Hiſtorian* Impartial, when he toucheth upon *Party-Matters*. *Te Deum* has frequently been ſung at *Paris* and *Vienna*, upon account of a Victory claim'd by both Parties, and if ſuch miſrepreſentations do happen, when thouſand are alive to teſtifie on which ſide the Victory fell; how ſhall we be capable to judge what happen'd at *Creſſy* and *Flodden Field?* No Man is better qualifyed to write the *Hiſtory* of a Country, than he who is a Native of it; and yet no Man more unfit for that work. A Stranger knows too little of it, and a Native knows too much always to ſpeak Truth. To conclude this matter, *Hiſtory* affords not the Security I cou'd wiſh in moſt

moſt particulars, but when it is made uſe of by Providence, to preſerve the Sacred *Depoſitum* of *Religion*, it grounds a certainty, excluding all doubt, nay, even ſetting apart the deſigns of Providence, 'tis morally impoſſible, that the *Hiſtorians* of all Ages, ſhou'd conſpire without any end, or provocation to impoſe a Lye upon Poſterity, and make them believe there was ſuch Perſons as *Moſes*, *Alexander*, *Ceſar*, *Chriſt*, *&c.* But what chiefly relates to this Subject, has already been ſufficiently handled in the *Paragraph* of *Moral Certainty*; and again in that of the *Certainty we have in depending upon Authority*, where the ſeveral degrees of *Moral Certainty* are fully explain'd.

SECTION XIII.

Certainty of Religion.

Politician. I Don't queſtion but you have long ſince thought me very troubleſome: I have only a Scruple or two, to remove concerning *Religion*, and you ſhall be releas'd from my Impertinencies. I do not much admire that there ſhould be ſo great an uncertainty in the ſeveral Inſtances I have menti-on'd, becauſe the Knowledge of them not being very material, the Conſequence of not knowing could not be fatal. But that Providence ſhould ſuffer us to fluctuate in uncertainties, upon neceſſary and indiſperſable Articles is not a very unintelligible management.

Religion

Religion ought to be the Center of Certainty: I eaſily conceive how the World may be divided where every Man's Reaſon is uncontroulable in her Search. But when God himſelf interpoſeth his Authority, and puts his Hand and Seal to their Commiſſion whom he Impowers to finiſh Debates; 'tis very ſurprizing to behold ſuch Heats, and ſuch a number of voluminous Controverſies. The *Heathen* is ſcandalized at a Crucified *God*: The *Chriſtian* glories in him: The *Church of Rome* makes the Word of God the Text, and the Church the Comment: The *Reform'd Churches* make the Word of God both Text and Comment: Every Independant People, vote themſelves into an Independant Church, and all that will not hear them are *Heathens* and *Publicans*. The Letter lies open to every Man's view, and he that has but a good pair of Eyes, and common Sence, may fiſh out a Religion for his purpoſe, and this is all the Certainty I can meet with upon that great Point.

Divine. I have met with ſo much variety in your Enquiries, that every Sentence afforded a new reliſh to my Curioſity: So your *Apology* for giving me this pretended trouble, is the only part of our Converſation which has appear'd irkſom to me. Now as to your laſt Objection: The Controverſies of *Religion* have ſomething common with other Debates, in as much as they acknowledge a dependance upon the Teſtimony of Sence, and the *Baſis* of firſt Principles, and where they can be run up to theſe *Heads*, they force aſſent. But as they

they are upon the ſame footing in their Original Certainty, ſo they are equally obnoxious to Miſrepreſentations, when Perſons make uſe of falſe *Mediums* to draw their Inferences. 'Tis true, Religion has an Advantage in one reſpect, *viz.* Inaſmuch as *Reveal'd Truths* have GOD for an *Immediate Informer*, whereas *Natural Truths* are only reveal'd in their *Principles*, and that too by way of general Inſtinct. *Reveal'd Truths* are enjoyn'd by way of Precept, under Penalty of Damnation, for making GOD a Lyar. *Natural Truths* are not enjoyn'd under any Penalty. Firſt, becauſe they don't immediately conduce towards Happineſs in the next Life. And again, becauſe there is ſo much Ignorance reigns in the World, that it would be impoſſible for all Men to find the connexion between firſt *Principles*, and all Inferior Natural Truths. I own, if the Motives of Credibility were as applicable to natural Truths, as they are to thoſe reveal'd, the Caſe would be equal, and it would be as neceſſary to aſſent to this Propoſition. *Heat is the occaſion of Rarefaction*, as to this, *Chriſt is the natural Son of God.* But as Things ſtand, the difference lies here, *Natural Truths* are only certainly known, by running them up to firſt Principles, whereas *Revealed Truths*, by a ſhorter way, have their Teſt from the motives of Credibility, which ſupply the place of firſt Principles, and are the *Non plus ultra* of Enquiry. Now to apply theſe Reflections to the Matter in Hand. I cannot deny but the World is torn in pieces by Diviſions as to Religion, as well as in Civil and Natural Controverſies, and

yet there is a *Landmark* of certainty in all these respects. First Principles in the Line of Nature and Authority, back'd with an undeniable Commission in all other Matters. I am unwilling to engage in Particular Debates, otherwise it would be no difficult Task upon the Foundation I have laid to determine whether the Notion of a Crucified GOD be Ignominious? Whether the Word of GOD ought to be both Text and Comment? Whether Independency be as eligible in the Church as in the State? And whether a good pair of Eyes and common Sense, be a secure Method in the choice of Religion? All which Debates I refer to the *Reader* upon the following Considerations. That some one *Sect of Christians* are as evidently justifiable in their *Tenets*; as *Christianity* in General is justifiable against *Jews* and *Infidels*. That the Motives of Christianity in their full force are applicable to *one distinct Body of Christians*, as they now stand divided. That some one Body of Christians are able to run up their *Tenets* to the original certainty of first Principles, and that they have as strong a Moral certainty that what they believe was taught by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, as that there were ever such *Persons* in the World. That in fine, the Knowledge we at present have of *Christ* and his Doctrine depending upon a Moral *Historical Certainty*; the same Moral Historical Certainty will justifie one Sect of Christians, and entitle them to those Motives of Credibility which sway'd the World to relinquish their Errors upon the *Messiah*'s approach.

If

If these Considerations appear to be of Moment, you may enforce them at leisure. In the mean time, you cannot but be sensible what a Sea of Errors you have been tumbling in. But there is a Centre for Opinions, no less than for Bodies in motion. Doing, and undoing, winding up and unravelling, seems to have been the Story of your whole Life. There are Scepticks in Practice, as well as Speculation, and Men equally find a diversion in Opining, as in variety of Pleasures. Doubts and Irresolution are Fuel to Mens Passions, and as long as the Judgment is not fix'd, it cannot be supposed there should be any uniformity in the Carriage. The Wicked move in a Circle, and when they have finish'd the whole Tour, they must either expire in Free-thinking, or shelter themselves in the Centre of Unity, and Certainty, from whence they first broke loose.

FINIS.

7 JUL 64

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